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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ New Spyware Doctor! ~ Big Brother On the Job ~ Studio Son beta!
~ Weighing .tel Domain! ~ AOL Blocking E-mails? ~ Students Face Off!

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- * MySpace.com Moves To Safety! *-
- * MySpace Hires Online Security Chief *-
- * WordPerfect Office Offers More for Less! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard           "Saying it like it is!"
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I was brought up to understand and believe that we all have choices in life, and the ability to make them. After last week, I realized that I had to make choice regarding my current career, and I made it. I made a good decision. How do I know? Because since I made the decision to leave, after almost 30 years, a huge weight has been lifted from my shoulders. You would not believe how many people have approached me, and told me how much more relaxed, and "normal" I appear these days! I feel good, and I'm looking forward to my pending temporary retirement! I have a number of "irons in the fire, so I'm not worried about my future. With all of the years of experience, as well as the number of people that I've worked with in and out of the workplace, I should be all set. I've already talked to a number of them, and the gears are in motion. In the meantime, I'm planning a number of projects that we've been putting off for awhile due to the lack of time. And, I have the golf clubs all ready to go - and the weather continues to be more Spring-like. If I had to plan a time to take some time off, this is probably the best time to do so!

A number of readers dropped me a line after last week's issue, when I made the announcement that I was "retiring." I appreciate the support, and only one reader expressed concern that perhaps I was making the wrong move. The way I look at it, the move was right for a number of reasons. But most importantly, it was one that had to be made to achieve some peace of mind and body. Whatever consequences arise in the future, I feel comfortable dealing with them. Thanks for taking the time to comment!

So, here I am preparing for some much needed rest, and planning all of those "Honey-Do" projects. I'll stock up on the beer this weekend, dust off the yard and garden tools, pick up some paint, flooring supplies, and whatever other supplies needed to get to work!

Until next time...

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Studio Son 2.09 beta

One year of very hard work to release a new version of the audio editor

So I've got a bit of a challenge. If any of you pinheads are

actually reading this instead of simply... excuse the language...
pissing and moaning... then why not write something and submit it
to us. If you can duplicate the volume of verbiage that you have in
the NewsGroup, we'd double the size of the magazine! Yeah, I
thought so... dead silence. Typical.

There. I've said it. Now on with our regularly scheduled
programming.

Remember me mentioning that I had gotten a rather nasty stomach bug
that made me basically want to crawl away somewhere and wait it
out?

Well, I THOUGHT I'd beaten it... or at least that it had gotten
tired of torturing me and had moved on to someone else... but I
was wrong. In the words of that little blond girl in a certain
scary movie... It's baaaack.

This has made me think about back in the bad old days when they
didn't even have sulfa drugs and there was no recourse but to wait
until the wee beastie either got run over by your own natural
defenses or your body gave in to problems that it caused.

It's popular wisdom that we are healthier today than back then, but
is that really the case? I mean, think about it. It's true that
the mortality rate is much lower today than it was back then, and
modern (and slightly less than modern) medicine has turned some
age-old monsters like the plague and smallpox into bad memories
and morality plays, but we're also now facing things like
antibiotic-resistant strains of pests that are becoming more and
more aggressive and persistent. And thanks to the fact that these
wonder drugs are, if not cheap, at least available to many of us,
the little bugs are learning to grab what they can, duck and run,
and come back another day to play.

Now, I'm not advocating a return to the middle ages, and I wouldn't
give up my Z-Pacs to get rid of bronchitis or sinus infection for
anything in the world, but there's got to be a happy medium
somewhere.

Who knows, maybe global warming will kill off some of the beasties
that modern science has helped to strengthen.

Okay, enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info
available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'Phantomm' asks about the MegaST's modem port speeds:

"What is the max Factory Baud Rate of the Mega ST's Modem Port?

And is there any software that will increase the Baud Rate when
using Net/Telecommunications software?"

Ronald Hall tells Phantomm:

"Hey. As far as I know, the maximum speed on a stock Mega ST is still that of the standard serial port on any ST model. In other words, 19.2k...

It can be sped up with -hardware-, like the RSVE mod.

HSMODEM software corrects bugs 'n uses faster routines, but doesn't actually speed up the stock serial port (unless you count not being slower because of re-transmission errors n' such)."

Joakim Högberg posts this about the latest XaAES snapshot:

"A new set of XaAES binaries are yet again available, and this time the appearance is in focus!

*The object renderer can now draw textured backgrounds in =>256 colour modes. Textures can be applied to window widgets, menus/popup menus and 3d-objects.

*XaAES can now also draw nice gradients to provide some eye-candy to eg. window title backgrounds and the likes.

*The way XaAES handles/arranges iconified windows has been improved a lot and can also be configured in great detail

*As usual, a lot of fixes and adjustments where you'll for example might notice that the taskmanager now can be accessed even when wind_update() has been locked

+Loads or smaller fixes and adjustments. Have fun!

The Unofficial XaAES Page: <http://xaaes.atariforge.net> "

Edward Baiz asks about getting a look at 'Ghost' files:

"Is there a good program that will display ghost files so I can delete them?"

Alexander Beuscher asks Edward:

"What kind of files do you regard as "ghost" files?

- hidden or system files?
 - > most desktops can be configured to show them
- damaged directory entries?
- "files" allocating space (in the FAT) but having no directory entries?
 - > here I'd propose tools like Diskus or simple disc monitors."

Ronald Hall tells Alexander:

"I'm wondering if he means zombie processes...?"

Lonny Pursell adds:

"Bash is pretty good at displaying all the files on the HD. Even ones with extremely long names that the desktop won't."

Mark Bedingfield asks what he calls a 'dumb XaAES question':

"I decided to have another whack at Xaaes. So far so good. I used Easymin/Xaaes 963 and then installed the latest version of Teradesk. That works fine. Now I am up to installing Xaaes' latest build. So that should be a challenge. Last time I tried it, was a disaster. So far so good tho.

A few questions tho, resolution changes under Xaaes is there any easy way to get 800x600@256 colours or 640x480@65536 colours? I am using a towered Falcon/CT2/NVDI5. I have the flags set for 640x480@256 colours atm.

Desktop piccys and other eye candy? Is everyone using Thing? Can Teradesk do it?

I keep getting a Wdialog error from Cops when firing it up as well using Xaaes/Teradesk. Any ideas there? For now I have reverted back to Xcontrol.

What/where is the definitive forum for such things? Is there an end to world hunger? Is there intelligent life in outer space?

Any answers to the simple ones would be appreciated!"

Odd Skancke asks Mark:

" 0.963? That is the old program version of the AES, right? (xaaes.prg or so?)

Oh? What happened the last time? Did you attempt installing the XaAES kernel module then?

XaAES can only use the resolutions available via the VDI, which means you need to know how to configure your screen-enhancer. If you let us know what you use we may be able to help.

I use Thing most of the time. But since I started work on real themes, the AES object renderer part, I found that Thing uses progdef's (a special AES object type that makes the AES call user-functions) to draw own AES objects. Effectively killing the idea of themes. I'll try to contact Thomas Binder regarding this. I think Teradesk is clean in this respect, but I haven't don't extensive tests.

What errors do you get? And the correct forum for XaAES discussions is the forum on xaaes.atari.org."

Mark replies:

"0.963. Yup thats it. The one used with the easymint installer. I decided to get it working before upgrading the kernal etc.

Yes (I tried installing the XaAES kernel) the last time. I did it last year. I can't recall exactly what happened but it failed and I hadn't backed up my boot drive. I have now;-) I suspect it was me being in a hurry again, and not spending enough time RTFM.

I'm using Centscreen, by the way.

As far as errors go, Wdailog needs to be run... or something along those lines. I suspect it is because I am starting it from the Auto folder rather than mint.cnf?"

Odd replies:

"There is absolutely no connection anymore between the kernel module and the old program version of XaAES.

Never EVER use Wdialog.prg under XaAES! wdialog is a hacked hack which will render a FreeMiNT/XaAES system unstable. XaAES have own implementation of most wdialog functions."

Andrew Floyd (I wonder if he's related to Haywood Floyd!?!) asks a question about an external drive for a buddy of his:

"A friend of mine has a 1040STf with a problem regarding the internal floppy. I don't know what he did to it, but almost 2 years ago when we had to move and the ST went to his apartment (long story how it was his, but I had it at my house), and when I set it up, it worked fine. Then he moved it to another room some time after that.

Now when he turns it on, the drive makes a noise, it does indeed spin the disk, but as I observed, the drive moves the head(s) back and forth, then at some point the desktop gives up and displays 2 drive icons and the Trash icon.

The disk in question used to boot up with a boot sector and virus detector thingy, then load a mouse accelerator, then load the desktop inf file, then go.

I tried another drive but the drive was dead, so I'm going to try one more drive that I can think of before I have to give up and tell him to buy a replacement. When I tried the apparently dead drive, the desktop wouldn't even come up with any drive icons at all."

The 1040STf is stock with absolutely no modifications. I hope there's no problem with the section of the power supply for the drive. I wonder if he dropped it or something while moving things and just won't admit it.

At any rate, I figure it'll cost him about \$50 or so for a new internal drive. It's got an external drive that for all I know works.

If the drive has a speed control thingy that I know is in the drives for the Atari 8-bits, I don't know where it is. I don't understand how this thing went out of spec just sitting around. I don't recall the internal drive making a noise before, so he's

done something that FUBARed it.

Any help on what could be wrong, good info on relatively cheap(er) priced replacements... replies here are probably what will happen, or you can email me directly (sorta preferred).

I managed to replace the internal drive on my 1040STf that yet another friend has with another 720K mech, but I don't count on finding those anymore at HAMfests for \$5."

'Charles' asks:

"should this guy do more diagnostics?
why doesn't he use sys-info take parameters into account ,then save the tos img with tos.ram, then load into emulator and compare tos from his computer to tos from emulator ... at this point my Ataris do that ,make little sound before realizing that there's no boot disk but analysing more could direct to further trouble... suggesting an internal circuit defect or something."

'Chris' adds something a bit more down-to-earth:

"Any normal 1.44 PC drive will work if you change the ID select.

No desktop icons is normally a deeper problem with the drive, plugging the cable in the wrong way can do that. oh and of course 1.44 drive actually need the cable plugging in backwards so you may have to do some plastic snapping to get it to fit.... Not all 720k drives will be set to the correct ID....

looking at the other posts here... Didn't Alison do a document about drives and mods?"

Derryck Croker adds his own thoughts:

"You did of course make sure that the ribbon cable was plugged into the replacement drive the right way round? Ataris are odd that way!

Also you need to reconfigure PC floppy drives to be ID0, they're normally set to be 1."

Everyone's favorite techie, Alison, adds her thoughts:

"Maybe try formatting a blank disk after the ST has crawled it to the desktop. This may identify a dead drive. The other (less than conventional) solution would be to give the ST the linch drop but if you have it open already just push all of the chips in one by one."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section  - Price Cut For PS2 Imminent?
   " " " " " " " " " " " " " "   Lara Croft Guinness Record?

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Price Cut Imminent for the PS2?

While much of the gaming world is focused on the PlayStation 3, Sony may divert attention back to the current generation of gaming by the end of the month.

An analyst's note, issued Wednesday, predicts the company will cut PlayStation 2 prices from \$149 to \$129 by the end of April.

Many analysts expected Sony (Research) to announce a PS2 price cut at E3, the annual trade show of the video game industry. But Colin Sebastian, senior research analyst for Lazard Capital Markets, said a move this month, coupled with last month's quiet price drop for the PSP handheld device (from \$249 to \$199), will allow the company to go into E3 with momentum and allow the focus to be solely on the PS3.

"In our opinion, hardware price cuts are necessary not only to drive demand at the end of a console cycle, but also to bring the current-generation consoles within reach of more value-oriented customers," wrote Sebastian.

A Sony spokesperson declined to comment, saying the company does not address "rumors and speculation".

A Sony price cut would likely be matched immediately by Microsoft (Research), which would lower the price of the original Xbox. However, since that company's focus is laser focused on its next generation machine - the Xbox 360 - it could result in some interesting moves.

Traditionally, price cuts are matched. So, when Sony goes to \$129, Microsoft follows (or vice versa). Microsoft, however, has greatly de-emphasized the original Xbox since the 360's launch - and, by some reports, is no longer manufacturing the original machine. If so, it doesn't have much to lose and may try to one-up Sony, in an attempt to gain its own momentum going into E3. That could, conceivably, mean a new Xbox price of \$99.

"Microsoft could do something like that just to make it a little more interesting, but I have no read on what Microsoft is going to do," Sebastian told me.

Whatever Microsoft's reaction, it might be a bit harder for consumers to capitalize on it. Supplies of the Xbox have declined considerably and a drastic price cut could make it a hard-to-find item.

A PS2 price cut could be a welcome shot in the arm for the gaming industry, which has seen revenues decline steadily in the recent months. (February software sales were down 13 percent compared to the 2005 numbers. Analysts expect the March numbers to show an even bigger gap.)

Increased hardware sales tend to boost software sales - and Sony recently cut the price on some of its biggest PS2 games, including "God of War" and "Gran Turismo 4" to \$19.99. Third party publishers, though, might find additional pressure to lower the price of their current generation games. Electronic Arts (Research), the leading independent publisher, was forced to reduce the price of several games, including seminal favorite "Madden" in January. Take Two Interactive Software (Research) also recently cut the price of its hit title "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas".

Lara Croft Nabs Guinness World Record

Cyber hottie adventurer Lara Croft has garnered a Guinness World Record as the most successful human video-game heroine of all time, according to Eidos Interactive, publisher of the "Tomb Raider" franchise.

The record-keeping organization awarded the recognition because Croft has transcended the boundaries of video games, Guinness noted.

The award comes at the same time that Eidos is shipping a new Croft game, "Tomb Raider: Legend." The game is already the top seller in the UK, and is expected to do robust business worldwide.

Since first arriving on the scene ten years ago, Lady Lara Croft has sold more than 28 million games globally. But she has also made the leap into other arenas, expanding her profile even among those who do not game. She "appeared" onstage with U2 and has had magazine spreads featuring her image.

In addition to being the focus of multiple comic books, she reached the mass market mainly through two film versions of "Tomb Raider," in which she was played by the alluring, yet intimidating Angelina Jolie.

Croft has even warranted a novel about one of her adventures - The Man in Bronze, published in 2005 - in which the femme fatale killed a man while kissing him.

With a world record under her gun-laden, machete-sporting belt, Lara Croft might be able to get even more notoriety than she already has.

But in other ways, she does not need the extra press to stay dominant in the game world, according to Louis Olson, an eBay manager for home electronics and video games.

"Lara Croft will linger because of the popularity of her franchise," he said. "Game heroes that endure do so because of the success of their franchise."

If Croft had appeared only in one game, it is unlikely that she would have made such an impression on the culture, or later made the leap to the silver screen.

By building a franchise that expanded the character's adventures, Eidos not only secured revenue, but actually nabbed a place in history for Lady Croft.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

MySpace.com to Post Ads Promoting Safety

Popular online social networking hub MySpace.com said Monday it will begin displaying public service ads aimed at educating its users, many of them teens, about the dangers posed by sexual predators on the Internet.

MySpace, a division of News Corp., enables computer users to meet any of more than 60 million members. Users put up profiles that are searchable and can include photos of themselves and such details as where they live and what music they like.

But MySpace's features and popularity with teens has raised concerns with authorities across the nation. There have been scattered accounts of sexual predators targeting minors they met through the site.

The ads were slated to begin running Monday on MySpace and through a host of News Corp. outlets, including other Fox Interactive Media Web sites, the 28 Fox Networks Group broadcast networks, Fox All Access radio and the New York Post.

The spots, which computer users will be able to see on MySpace in the form of banner ads, are part of a campaign launched two years ago by the Ad Council and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

The campaign warns parents and teens that sexual predators are increasingly using the veil of anonymity provided by online chat rooms, forums and social networking sites to target minors.

"One of the things we're trying to persuade kids to do is not to give out personal details online, don't advertise where they are and who they are," said Ernie Allen, president of the Alexandria, Va.-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. "The person with whom they may be interacting may not be who they say they are."

According to MySpace, some 22 percent of users are registered as under 18.

MySpace forbids minors 13 and under from joining and provides special protections for those 14 and 15 - only those on their friends' list can view their profiles.

The company uses a computer program that analyzes user profiles and flags members likely to be under 14. Hundreds of thousands of flagged profiles have been deleted, the company has said.

Still, children regularly lie about their age to get around those restrictions.

Last month, two men were arrested in what prosecutors said were the first federal sex charges involving MySpace. Two Connecticut girls involved in that case were 11 and 14, the FBI said.

MySpace.com Hires Online Safety Chief

MySpace.com said Tuesday it has tapped a former federal prosecutor and Microsoft Corp. executive to be its online safety chief, the latest move by the social networking site to shore up security.

The announcement comes one day after MySpace began running public service ads warning its users about the dangers posed by sexual predators on the Internet.

Hemanshu Nigam currently serves as a director responsible for driving Microsoft's consumer security outreach and child-safe computing strategies. During his stint as a trial attorney at the Department of Justice, he specialized in child exploitation cases.

Nigam's job at MySpace will be to oversee safety, education, privacy and law enforcement affairs. He'll also handle online safety for other Fox Interactive Media sites.

His appointment is effective May 1.

The job is a new position at MySpace, although many of the responsibilities have been handled thus far by several employees, the company said.

A division of News Corp., MySpace enables computer users to meet any of more than 60 million members. Users post searchable profiles that can include photos of themselves and such details as where they live and what music they like.

But the Web site's features and popularity with teens have raised concerns with authorities nationwide. There have been scattered accounts of sexual predators targeting minors they met through the site.

Spyware Doctor 3.5 for Windows

PC Tools has updated its antispyware software with Spyware Doctor 3.5. The latest version combines strong protection against keyloggers, adware, and spyware with new tools to remove rootkits and other hard-to-rid malware.

The program downloads and installs easily. The clean and intuitive interface makes it a breeze to use. After the initial setup, the software will run unobtrusively in the background with just a lone icon in your system tray.

PC Tools offers a free trial version that will supply real-time protection, but to remove spyware, you must register for the full version, which costs \$29.95.

Given the terrible foothold spyware has on thousands of computers, I would rather see a trial version that removes the infections and protects the PC for a short time, giving me the option of buying after the service is disabled. I am always hesitant to pay for a product before I see it perform its full functions.

Spyware Doctor boasts a myriad of defense schemes including real-time protection, keylogger detection and removal, and a pop-up blocker. The OnGuard module offers an impressive array of real-time monitoring and prevention components that block attempted changes to Windows control files including the startup, network, and browser settings.

Keylogger Guard prevents malicious programs from recording keystrokes and phoning home with sequences of bank account numbers and passwords. The Immunizer filters out codes that surreptitiously download from unfriendly Web sites and install from innocent-looking file attachments.

Spyware Doctor 3.5 features two new protection technologies. One is an innovative Kernel Delete feature that gives the antispyware detection module new ways to remove rootkits and other complex malware that fights to stay hidden or resurrects itself on reboot. The other technology is a detection engine that highlights hidden, running processes that built-in tools like Windows Task Manager cannot find.

Using the Quick Scan option for the first time won't break any speed records, but for subsequent checks, it takes a fraction of the original time. Another option is to set conditions for a custom scan.

To test for system degradation, I viewed the scan progress in one window while running a Web browser and word processor alternately in separate windows. No noticeable system slowdown occurred during the spyware scan.

This latest version of Spyware Doctor found most but not all of the planted keyloggers and adware programs slipped onto the test computer before installation. This is a huge improvement over previous versions of Spyware Doctor. However, the pop-up blocker is a disappointment because it does not work with Firefox, the default browser on our test desktop. It only activates in Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

Another potential annoyance: frequent, essential updates to the program do not download automatically to your PC - you must give your OK before downloading and then click to install the updates yourself.

Overall, Spyware Doctor 3.5 keeps a tight rein on its signature database to control false positives. This factor alone puts it a big step ahead of similar products.

Spyware Doctor 3.5 is a solid choice to protect your PC from unwanted malware. It provides very good real-time monitoring for new intrusions and relatively good detection and removal results. If rootkits and other super

baddies worry you, Spyware Doctor 3.5 will take those cares away.

Minimum requirements: Windows XP, Me, 98, and 2000; Internet Explorer.

Pros: Simple and intuitive interface; few false positives; very good detection and removal results.

Cons: No spyware removal feature in trial version; pop-up blocker only works in Explorer; updates aren't fully automatic.

Verdict: A very good choice for consumers who want set-it-and-forget-it protection.

Rating: 4 out of 5

Price: \$29.95 for full version.

www.pctools.com

WordPerfect Office Offers More for Less

If you're tired of waiting for Microsoft's delayed Office 2007, consider this: Feature for feature and dollar for dollar, Corel's \$300 WordPerfect Office X3 Standard tops the \$400 Office 2003 Standard in every category.

All five principal apps - WordPerfect, Quattro Pro, Presentations, Mail, and Presentations Graphics - are first rate. Leading the pack is the WordPerfect word processor. For many WordPerfect users, one feature puts the program head-and-shoulders above Word and every other word processor: Reveal Codes. This View menu option opens a pane at the base of the screen showing the document's formatting codes. For fine-grain control over a file's look and content, nothing beats it.

You needn't worry about Office users' not being able to open and edit the files you create with WordPerfect Office. In WordPerfect, Quattro Pro, and Presentations, you're given the option of working in the mode of the program's Office equivalents (Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, respectively).

In testing a shipping copy of the software, I was plagued by a few minor formatting issues as I used Office file formats in the various WordPerfect Office apps, especially WordPerfect itself. I had better luck working with files in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF), which the suite has supported for years. This latest version adds the ability to import and edit PDF files in WordPerfect and Quattro Pro.

WordPerfect's new Mail program, formerly the Bloomba mail client from Stata Labs, features a search function that neither Outlook nor any other e-mail program can top. The new app indexes your messages and lets you search for mail via drop-down menus by a combination of date, sender, content, and other attributes. During testing, the mail program's data store became corrupted, but I was able to restore it in just minutes via Windows' command prompt, as outlined in these instructions from Corel.

Another new addition to the suite is the Presentations Graphics program. This image editor won't make people forget about Photoshop anytime soon, but considering that Office has no graphics program, it's a nice addition. The app has all of the standard tools for creating layouts and working

with shapes, colors, textures, and shading.

Though I enjoyed using WordPerfect Office X3, it has some annoying traits. For example, the app will rather surreptitiously add Yahoo Toolbar to your browser during setup if you don't pay attention, and the pesky InstallShield Update Manager puts itself in Windows' startup list and resides in the system tray, even when no WordPerfect Office apps are open.

Such irritations aside, I think people who use their PC for business - and who are looking for a real productivity-suite upgrade - might very well find what they need in WordPerfect Office X3.

Corel WordPerfect Office X3 Standard For a true upgrade to an office suite, business users will find much to like in Corel's package. Street: \$300 (\$160 upgrade) Current prices (if available)

Internet Agency Weighs '.tel' Domain Name

Reaching out and touching someone used to be as simple as dialing a string of numbers. But now there are home, cell and work phone numbers from which to choose, and sometimes work extensions to remember.

There are also e-mail addresses - at home and at work - and instant messaging handles, perhaps separate ones for the various services, some of which now do voice and video besides text. Some people even have Web pages - through their employer or Internet service provider, or perhaps a profile or two on MySpace.

To help people manage all their contact information online, the Internet's key oversight agency is considering a ".tel" domain name. If approved, the domain could be available this year.

As proposed, individuals could use a ".tel" Web site to provide the latest contact information and perhaps even let friends initiate a call or send a text message directly from the site. Businesses could use a ".tel" site to determine customers' locations and route them automatically to the correct call center.

Its proponents also envision ".tel" as a place from which the various people-finding services on the Internet could pull the latest contact information as individuals move about. Now, data typically come from third-party sources like phone listings, which may be old or incomplete, particularly if an entire household is listed under one name.

And telephony applications and devices yet to be built could one day make use of such data, especially as wireless and wireline networks converge, according to London-based Telnic Ltd., which proposed and would run the domain if it is approved.

There's nothing inherent in ".tel" that would enable these features; rather, its aim is to create a place to which people would know to go to find contact information.

Todd Masonis, a co-founder of contact management service Plaxo Inc., is familiar with the hassles of keeping track of everyone.

His parents have had the same house and phone number for some 30 years,

and "for a long time that was how they are identified," Masonis said. "But in the last two years, even they have had a couple of cell phones, a couple of e-mail addresses and Web pages and instant message IDs."

Still, he questions the need for ".tel" when companies like his already use ".com" to host services that help manage contacts. He worries that a ".tel" name would create yet another identifier for people to remember, without doing away with the others.

The board of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers plans to review the proposal Tuesday, although it may wait until next month or later to decide.

Telnic officials likened ".tel" to the creation of domain names decades ago as an easier-to-remember alternative to the series of numbers behind every Internet-connected computer. Instead of memorizing a friend's phone numbers, they say, just remember the ".tel" address.

But Telnic was vague on how all this would work, saying it is merely enabling developers to come up with innovative ways to use ".tel."

Nor did the company say in its application how much a ".tel" name would cost. A spokesman said Friday that officials were unavailable because of the Easter holiday.

Telnic was one of two applicants for ".tel" when ICANN sought bids in 2004 for new domain names. John Jeffrey, ICANN's general counsel, said the other ".tel" applicant had failed to correct deficiencies identified by an independent review panel. But that applicant, Internet telephony pioneer Jeff Pulver, blamed politics for the rejection.

In recent years, ICANN has approved ".eu" for the European Union, ".jobs" for human-resources sites, ".travel" for the travel industry, ".mobi" targeting mobile services and ".cat" for the Catalan language, bringing the number of domains to 264.

The organization also is in negotiations to create ".xxx" for porn sites, ".asia" for the Asia-Pacific community and ".post" for postal services.

The few who submitted comments to ICANN on ".tel" were skeptical.

Francisco Cabanas, owner of Canadian domain registration company FineE.com, said an organization like The Associated Press could simply create an address at "tel.ap.org," rather than require an "ap.tel."

Otherwise, who would get the ".tel" name? The AP? Internet service provider AccessPort, which uses "ap.net"? Or Audio Precision Inc., at "ap.com"?

"It kind of magnifies the problem," Cabanas said. "If I'm looking for a phone number or an e-mail address or whatever and I'm getting a totally different (company), it defeats the purpose."

Also unclear is what the demand would be like, giving the popularity of ".com."

The seven domains approved in 2000 - including ".aero," ".museum," and ".info" - "just never have caught on," said Dan Tobias, a Boca Raton, Fla., computer programmer who runs a site on domain names. "Nobody's figured out how to educate the public enough to seek out a different ... domain."

AOL Accused Of Blocking Critics' Emails

A coalition fighting AOL's upcoming pay-to-send email service claimed Thursday that the company was blocking delivery of emails that included a link to the group's Web site.

The DearAOL.com Coalition, which is circulating online petitions to gather signatures for an open letter to AOL, said emails with the link www.DearAOL.com were bounced back to the sender with a message saying, "failed permanently."

AOL, a subsidiary of Time Warner Inc., denied it was blocking email, blaming the snafu on a "technical glitch."

"A technical glitch arose on AOL late Wednesday affecting a range of different Web links in emails," AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham said in an emailed statement. "We discovered the issue early this morning. Our postmaster and mail operations teams started working to identify this software glitch at that time, and it has already been fixed."

AOL said messages that included the coalition's link were being delivered normally on Thursday, as well as all other email. The DearAOL Coalition confirmed that messages were no longer getting blocked.

The coalition, comprised mostly of nonprofit groups, is against AOL's plans to launch a guaranteed email service targeted primarily at organizations that send bulk email. The paid service would ensure that AOL subscribers would receive the messages and their attachments and links, provided they had agreed to in advance. AOL partner Goodmail Systems Inc. would run the certified email service, expected to launch this month.

AOL is offering a similar service for nonprofits, but the coalition says the free offering doesn't go far enough to match the paid service, which is meant to separate legitimate commercial email from spam.

The group on Thursday said the bounced-back messages proved their point in objecting to the paid service, which they claim would give Internet service providers too much control over the delivery of email on the public Web.

"Left to their own devices, AOL will always put its own self interest ahead of the public interest in a free and open Internet, Timothy Karr, campaign director of Free Press, said in a statement, which also accused AOL of trying to censor its critics.

Free Press, a national group working on Internet policy issues, is a member of the coalition, along with political action committee MoveOn.org, Gun Owners of America, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Association of Cancer Online Resources, the Humane Society, and the AFL-CIO.

Wes Boyd, co-founder of MoveOn.org, was one of the people who reported having messages bounced back.

I tried to email my brother-in-law about DearAOL.com and AOL sent me a response as if he had disappeared, Boyd said in the coalition statement. But when I sent him an email without the DearAOL.com link, it went right through.

Members of the DearAOL.com Coalition claim to represent about 15 million people. The group, according to organizers, has grown since last month to 600 member organizations from the original 50. More than 350,000 Internet users have signed letters to AOL opposing its pay-to-send plans, the group says.

Monitoring Employee Communications in the Enterprise

As the number of workers using the Internet for pleasure as well as business grows, so does anxiety among corporate higher-ups worried about productivity and exposure to security risks.

Many executives and managers have turned to computer surveillance. Low-cost technology is making it easier than ever for businesses of all sizes to monitor computer misuse among employees.

The market for this so-called secure content-management software - which includes applications that monitor Web surfing, e-mail, instant messaging, and even keystrokes - is expected to grow to \$6.4 billion by 2007, more than double what it was just three years ago, according to the research firm IDC.

"The use of corporate management of employee use of the Internet is widespread today," said Mike Newman, vice president and general counsel at Websense, a company that makes Internet and desktop security software. "More than half of the Fortune 500 firms alone use our Web-filtering products."

The Internet can be tempting to workers who would rather check out eBay than check in with their clients. But by giving employees unmonitored reign over instant messaging, personal e-mail, file downloading, and virtual window shopping, I.T. managers and CIOs risk getting more than they bargained for.

In addition to lost productivity and wasted bandwidth resources, companies can be held liable for a broad range of misconduct that includes sexual harassment and the use of unlicensed software.

The proliferation of spam is also a huge concern, as it not only consumes valuable I.T. resources, but can also expose a company to legal liability if people find the unwanted messages offensive. Workers also risk introducing viruses into the corporate network by downloading unauthorized files.

The possibility of sensitive corporate data being lost or stolen outright is also feeding the upswing in workplace surveillance. Technology such as USB drives and digital-camera storage media make it easier than ever for workers to find, store, and swap information.

Corporate America is paying attention. A 2005 report by Proofpoint, an e-mail security company, found that 63 percent of companies with 1,000 or more employees either use or plan to employ staff to look at outbound e-mail. A similar study by the American Management Association found those numbers to be 52 percent in 2003 compared to 24 percent in 2001.

While the percentage of employees with Internet access at work has remained largely unchanged, more employees are using the Net on the job

even if their activities are not work-related.

Websense, which interviewed 350 I.T. managers and 500 employees for a May 2005 survey, found a blurry line between work and play. Half of the respondents said their Web surfing on the job was a mix of work and personal use, and of those employees who admitted to personal use, 52 percent stated that they would rather give up their morning coffee than go without Internet access.

In fact, 93 percent of employees surveyed said they spent at least some time accessing the Internet at work, up from 86 percent in 2004. The most popular Web-site categories unrelated to work were news (81 percent), personal e-mail (61 percent), online banking (58 percent), travel (55 percent), and shopping (52 percent).

The rationale behind monitoring employees, according to Newman, is that a computer at work is a corporate tool for enhancing the employee's productivity. Because some people abuse that privilege by sending personal e-mail and viewing movies during working hours, employers feel they have little choice but to monitor what their workers are doing.

"Most companies are very clear with the Internet-use policies. The company owns the computer system and the network. Clearly, there is no expectation of privacy on the part of the workers," Newman said.

Precedent-setting litigation would seem to back up that claim.

Traditionally, courts have sided with employers in privacy suits filed by workers.

In 1993's *Bourke v. Nissan*, plaintiffs Bonita Bourke and Rhonda Hall alleged that Nissan wrongfully fired them after their bosses accessed, printed, and read their e-mails at work. A trial court upheld the auto maker's contention that the plaintiffs had no reasonable expectation of privacy in their e-mails.

In 1996, Michael A. Smyth sued Pillsbury after he was fired for transmitting "inappropriate and unprofessional" comments to his supervisor over the company's e-mail system. Smyth said the company's actions invaded his privacy, but the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania ruled in favor of Pillsbury.

According to Richard Corenthal, a partner in the New York law firm of Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein, P.C., federal law clearly establishes employers' rights to monitor e-mail.

"Once that is in place and the policy is provided to the employees, they effectively have no recourse," Corenthal explained. "Nor is there any expectation of privacy in the workplace."

The advocacy group Privacy Rights Clearinghouse counsels visitors to its Web site that if an e-mail system is used at a company, the employer owns it and can review its contents: "Messages sent within the company as well as those that are sent from your terminal to another company or from another company to you can be subject to monitoring by your employer." According to the privacy rights organization, the employer can also monitor Web-based e-mail accounts such as Yahoo and Hotmail, as well as instant messages.

But employers would do well to exercise some restraint, lest they create

problems by improperly monitoring workers' e-mail accounts.

"There are some interesting twists to the question," Corenthal said. "For example, policies must be evenly enforced or otherwise the employer might be the subject of a discrimination claim.-

One approach gaining favor in some corporate circles is to set aside time for workers to surf the Web or take care of other business online, reducing the likelihood that they will shirk their responsibilities on the job.

"A company can give its employees quota time to look at various Web sites," Websense's Newman said. "Then there is no need to monitor their activities since the amount of time is regulated. A company can also grant unlimited access to workers during certain times of the shift when bandwidth issues are less of a concern."

Christine Liebert, a senior analyst at the consulting firm Yankee Group, agreed that such shared-use strategies could become a viable solution to any unpleasantness generated by spying. Even if workers did not agree to such self-imposed limitations, I.T. departments could routinely put bandwidth-shaping and application-shaping software in place to manage these limits, she said.

And software could continue to maintain controls that protect the company from security risks. Websense, for example, has a pop-up feature notifying a worker that the requested Web site is not work-related. It then asks the employee if he or she wishes to use some of the allotted quota time.

"Employees are aware of the limitations placed on them," Newman said. "We use this same software internally at Websense. I don't mind it."

Students Face Off in Programming Contest

Brainy students worked in teams of three Wednesday to cram an entire semester of work into five hours by solving such computing puzzles as how to connect gears of a clock when given a specific shaft speed.

Russia's Saratov State University took an early lead among the 82 teams, having correctly solved five questions in eight attempts. The only U.S. school in the top 10 was the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, placing seventh in the early results.

If the real world can be a pretty unfair place, this problem-solving competition could be considered downright cruel. In the finals of the Association for Computing Machinery's International Collegiate Programming Contest, teams are given just five hours to solve 10 problems that would take ordinary people months to complete.

"When was the last time you heard someone say 'I need a piece of software in 10 minutes?" said Bill Poucher, the contest's executive director and a computer science professor at Baylor University, the contest's administrative headquarters.

In a circular assembly hall that included spectator seating and even walkways covered in artificial turf, two overhead projection screens showed real-time scores.

Competitors huddled around glowing computer screens, chatted with teammates and shuffled stacks of paper as they worked against the looming deadline.

Adding to the hushed tension: As each team solved a problem, a colored balloon rose above their table to let rivals and spectators know where they stand.

For many, it's like any sporting event - just with lines of computer code instead of balls and nets.

"It's an intellectual competition, and any competition is a sport," said Andrew Lopatin, 25, a two-time past winner from St. Petersburg State University in Russia and now a coach for that school's team.

"It is a very nervous situation," the quantum computing doctorate student said as he paced the spectator floor wearing black sweat pants and sandals.

The questions for this year's contest, the 30th annual, were dizzyingly complex.

Among the puzzlers, greatly simplified here:

Write a program that computes how the gears of a clock can be connected with an hour and a minute hand, based on a provided input shaft speed with a maximum of three gears per shaft.

Create a program that can find the maximum numbers of degrees of separation for a network of people.

Develop a system to interconnect different nodes of a corporate network in the cheapest possible way.

The competitors must solve each conundrum using programming languages like C++ and Java, but the best teams often have someone versed in physics and mathematics as well.

"Computer programming is to what they do as typing is to what a novelist does," Poucher said.

Winners are determined based on how many correct answers they submit within the time limit. In the event of a tie, the schools are ranked based on how many attempts they needed to submit the right answer.

In the early results, Saratov State was followed by Altai State Technical University in Russia; the University of Twente in the Netherlands; China's Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Poland's Warsaw University; and St. Petersburg.

Moscow State University was eighth, behind MIT and ahead of Ontario, Canada-based University of Waterloo and Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland.

The first-place team members each get a \$10,000 scholarship as well as computer gear from IBM Corp., the event's main sponsor.

But it's the recognition that's considered the biggest reward, said Doug Heintzman, director of IBM's Lotus division.

"They get bragging rights and they have on their resumes that they were here," said Heintzman, who added that IBM has hired 80 contest winners over the years. "Inside the head of one of those kids is a cure for cancer or AIDS. It's sitting out there."

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